

THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND–VIETNAM STUDIES AND  
OBSERVATIONS GROUP–A CASE STUDY IN  
SPECIAL OPERATIONS CAMPAIGNING

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
General Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT

THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND–VIETNAM STUDIES AND OBSERVATIONS GROUP–A CASE STUDY IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS CAMPAIGNING, by Major Ian W. D. Sherman, 72 pages.

Special Operations Forces (SOF) are a limited resource that cannot be rapidly produced. SOF are designed to be a tool for achieving strategic objectives but recent operational experience has seen an increased demand for SOF at the tactical level. What factors contribute to the employment of SOF on tasks that are directly linked to the achievement of strategic objectives? Previous studies of special operations have concentrated on defining special operations and how they achieve disproportionate results. Much of the literature deals with tactical considerations. There is some literature that has identified conditions associated with successful employment of SOF. This qualitative research study examines the case study of the Military Assistance Command–Vietnam, Studies and Observations Group (MACV–SOG), as an example of a special operations campaign, and conducts a comparative analysis against the existing conditions for successful employment of SOF. This thesis examines the factors and common themes from this study, considering how they can contribute to the success or failure of a special operation campaign. These themes are considered for their applicability to Australian Special Operations Command in order to make recommendations for the future conduct of special operations campaigns.

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## ACRONYMS

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CT	Counter Terrorism
DA	Direct Action
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
MACV	Military Assistance Command–Vietnam
MACV-SOG	Military Assistance Command–Vietnam, Studies and Observations Group
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NSC	National Security Council
OPLAN	Operations Plan
OPSEC	Operational Security
OSS	Office of Strategic Studies
SACSA	Office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOG	Studies and Observations Group
SR	Special Reconnaissance
UW	Unconventional Warfare



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

SOF need a high command that possesses a strategic mentality. A high command that is unable to function strategically is unlikely to appreciate the strategic value of SOF. A country's high command which fixates upon battles and campaigns neglects the realm of strategy. Moreover, even a country that remembers strategy may still neglect to fight in ways that promote the political objectives of the war.

— Colin S. Gray, *Parameters*

#### Introduction

The existence of special military units that provide capabilities outside of the scope of conventional military forces is possibly as old as warfare. The Mongol warlord, Yasotay is credited with stating around 1220 AD, "When the hour of crisis comes, remember that 40 selected men can shake the world."<sup>1</sup> When the British were defeated and withdrawn from France in 1940, Winston Churchill directed the establishment of special units that could wage an unconventional war of sabotage to "set Europe ablaze."<sup>2</sup> The development of special operations forces (SOF) in World War II along with the command and control organizations that planned and executed the special operations campaigns, laid the foundations for the theory of special operations we have today. The

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Defence Force, Australian Defence Doctrine Publication 3.12, *Special Operations* (Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2004), 1-1.

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Morris, "The Special Operations Executive 1940-1946," BBC History, February 17, 2011, accessed May 3, 2016, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/soe\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/soe_01.shtml).

recent Global War on Terrorism and other associated military actions have seen an unprecedented rise in the numbers of SOF and their employment.

Recent operations in Afghanistan, in particular, have increased the desire of conventional battle space owners to receive their share of special operations effects. Special operations have come to be viewed as the panacea for all military problems. Politicians view SOF as a low risk minimalist investment that produces results; even for problems that are not yet defined or understood. Operational level commanders see SOF as a method for overcoming restrictions such as troop number limitations. Tactical commanders see SOF as essential to providing them with tactical effects they cannot achieve because of a lack of specialist skills or enabling capabilities.

### Background

Special operations are often misunderstood and have been difficult to define, sometimes defined as simple being whatever conventional operations are not. Ultimately, most definitions of special operations share a common thread—they are operations that are designed to have a direct strategic or political outcome.

Joint Publication (JP) 3-05 defines special operations, as “often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically and/or diplomatically sensitive environments, and are characterized by one or more of the following: time-sensitivity, clandestine or covert nature, low visibility, work with or through indigenous forces, greater requirements for regional orientation and cultural expertise, and a higher degree of risk.”<sup>3</sup> This definition

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014), ix.

focuses on the characteristics of a special operations rather than the purpose. Colonel Cory M. Peterson, a USAF special operations officer, provided an alternate definition in his essay submitted to the Joint Special Operations University. Peterson defined special operations as “tactical activities which result in political and strategic-level effects. Special operations are conducted by highly trained and educated operators due to the significant, primarily political, risk of mission failure or exposure.”<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, Peterson’s definition of special operations will be used.

### Problem Statement

The problem is that experience in Afghanistan has demonstrated the misuse of SOF by employing them to achieve tactical objectives, as opposed to the historical and doctrinal purpose of SOF, conducting tactical actions that are directly linked to achieving strategic objectives. SOF are expensive to train and equip, they use methods that are inherently dangerous, and are a limited resource. Because of these characteristics, SOF must focus on conducting tactical actions directly linked to strategic or political objectives and conducting these actions predominantly outside of general awareness and observation. The purpose of this study is to conduct a qualitative analysis of the methods used to plan and conduct special operations campaigns to identify the factors that contribute to achieving strategic or political outcomes with special operations.

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<sup>4</sup> Cory M. Peterson, “The Use of Special Operations Forces in Support of American Strategic Security Strategies.” JSOU Publications. 2014, accessed July 24, 2015, <http://jsou.socom.mil/JSOU%20Publications/JSOU%20and%20NDIA%20SOLIC%20Essay%20Contest%20Winner.pdf>, 4-5.

### Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research case study is to examine the employment of SOF and, through comparative analysis, identify factors that contribute to ensuring SOF are employed appropriately—at the strategic level of war. These lessons will then be assessed for their applicability to Australian Special Operations Command.

### Primary Research Question

What factors contribute to SOF campaigns achieving effective results linked to strategic objectives?

### Secondary Research Questions

In addressing this question, we must examine:

1. What is the role and missions of SOF?
2. How should special operations campaigns integrate into wider conventional campaigns?
3. How should special operations campaigns be commanded and controlled?

### Assumptions

The main assumption in this thesis is that special operations doctrine and employment is so similar amongst the five eyes community<sup>5</sup> that the lessons learned from one nation are applicable and transferable between all five nations. Additionally, there is a school of thought that tactics, techniques and procedures, rather than their operational

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<sup>5</sup> The five eyes community refers to the intelligence alliance comprising of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

objective define special operations. This thesis is based on an assumption that special operations should be primarily used to achieve strategic or political effects.

### Limitations

The primary limitation of this thesis is the classification of material. The reference material available to draw conclusions from will limit the study and it will only use unclassified material. With this in mind, most of the research conducted in this thesis will not concentrate on tactics, techniques and procedures but will generalize themes and lessons, to maintain operational security.

### Scope and Delimitations

There is an abundant number of special operations that have been conducted during the past 70 years. This study will not attempt to examine every special operation but confine itself to one specific example of a special operation campaign. United States Joint Service and Army doctrine will be used in the discussion framing special operations, but this study is not limited to US SOF only and will not address US specific technical command and control methodologies, but rather it will seek to identify enduring themes that are applicable in a universal sense.

US Army doctrine establishes Military Information Support Operations (MISO) and Civil Affairs (CA) as components of special operations. For the purpose of this study, MISO and CA will not be considered outside of their use as an enabling component of a special operations campaign. This study, whilst not specifically excluding special operations conducted during Phase Zero, will not deal specifically with them. There will

inevitably be relevant points, but this study will focus on special operations conducted during Phases II to V of the joint operations continuum.<sup>6</sup>

### Definitions

In the completion of this study it is important to define a number of key terms that will be used throughout this document.

Campaign. A campaign is a series of related military operations aimed at accomplishing a military strategic or operational objective within a given time and space.<sup>7</sup>

SOE. SOF are personnel that have been specially selected, trained and equipped to conduct special operations and are organized into units specifically dedicated to the command, control and conduct of special operations.<sup>8</sup>

Special Operations. Special operations are tactical activities which result in political and strategic-level effects. Special operations are conducted by highly trained and educated operators due to the significant, primarily political, risk of mission failure or exposure.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2011), V-6. Defines the generic phased approach to a joint operation as having six phases. These phases are: Phase 0-Shape, Phase I-Deter, Phase II-Seize the Initiative, Phase III-Dominate, Phase IV-Stabilize, and Phase V-Enable Civil Authority.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Publication (JP) 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014), GL-11.

<sup>9</sup> Peterson, 4-5.



### Significance of Study

This study is significant because maintaining SOF is expensive, in terms of both resources and personnel. SOF are a limited and expensive resource, using them to achieve tactical objectives is wasteful and counterproductive to maintaining effective operational security. Additionally, SOF are a resource that cannot be mass-produced. Attempts to rapidly, or excessively, increase the size of SOF will result in a dilution of the overall capability. Identifying factors that directly influence the effective employment of SOF will aid in future employment of this valuable resource.

### Author's Background

The author is an Australian Army Officer with experience as a special operations officer. He has served in appointments at the tactical, operational and strategic levels in both command and staff positions. He has multiple operational deployments planning and executing special operations in unilateral, joint and multinational deployments.

### Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has introduced the issue of special operations as a strategic capability, but one that is often incorrectly employed. Special operations are an expensive and vulnerable capability, therefore identifying factors that will enhance their effective future employment is useful. This chapter has defined the background issues and provided the scope and purpose of this qualitative research case study. The next chapter will explore the existing body of literature on the topic of special operations. This will establish the baseline of understanding on the considerations and principles for the effective use of SOF and special operations campaigns. Through the lens of the research

questions, a comparative analysis will be conducted against the case study of MACV–SOG.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

SOF are a limited and expensive resource providing highly specialized capabilities that should be employed to achieve strategic or political results for the expense involved. To effectively research the factors that impact the strategic use of SOF it is essential to review a variety of sources. There is a significant amount of literature written about special operations, including published books, professional journals, military academic monographs and doctrinal publications. Much of this literature is descriptive of tactical activities and does not significantly contribute to framing this discussion. There is a smaller body of published work that has been dedicated to discussing special operations theory as an element of military strategy. A good starting point to frame the discussion on special operations campaigning is the joint doctrine for special operations and employment of SOF. This doctrinal basis of understanding is supported by a small selection of published books that provide an intellectual depth of our understanding of special operations. Finally, there is a plethora of professional journal articles that augment the written literature with additional concepts and observations. From these journal articles there are some noteworthy ones that have served to advance the collective understanding of special operations and their strategic utility.

#### Doctrine

As a starting point for framing understanding of special operations, Joint Publication (JP) 3-05 *Special Operations*, provides the basis for our understanding of

special operations. It defines them as “often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically and/or diplomatically sensitive environments, and are characterized by one or more of the following: time-sensitivity, clandestine or covert nature, low visibility, work with or through indigenous forces, greater requirements for regional orientation and cultural expertise, and a higher degree of risk.”<sup>10</sup> JP 3-05 also describes the broad categories of special operations into 12 core activities: Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, countering weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, hostage rescue and recovery, counterinsurgency, foreign humanitarian assistance, military information operations and civil affairs operations. The definitions of these activities is provided in the glossary.

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Defense, JP 3-05, ix.

Special Operations Core Activities	
Direct Action	Hostage Rescue and Recovery
Special Reconnaissance	Counterinsurgency
Counterterrorism	Foreign Humanitarian Assistance
Unconventional Warfare	Military Information Support Operations
Foreign Internal Defense	Civil Affairs Operations
Security Force Assistance	Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction

Figure 1. SOF Core Activities

*Source:* USSOCOM, *Special Operations Forces Reference Manual*, 4th ed. (MacDill AFB, FL: The JSOU Press, 2015).

The use of the core activities construct is problematic because it overlaps with terms used to describe other operations in the range of military operations applicable to conventional forces. More problematic is the lack of consistency in the classifications, some are classified by the objective whilst others are classified by the methods used. If we consider the core activity of hostage recovery we can easily identify that in the conduct of a hostage recovery we could use an indigenous force (unconventional warfare) to conduct a direct action that has been enabled by a special reconnaissance task and a military information operation.

An alternate way of categorizing the core activities is to divide them into activities that are using special skills to support wider tactical and operational objectives

and activities that are conducted as standalone special missions achieving strategic objectives. This categorization is depicted in figure 2.



Figure 2. Special Operations Core Activities–Re-categorized

*Source:* Created by author

JP 3-05 provides a starting point for framing any discussion on special operations campaigning, but it is far from a complete source of answers. Perhaps for this reason USSOCOM published the *Special Operations Forces Reference Manual* to provide a summary of the doctrine as well as provide additional commentary on the structure, roles and responsibilities within USSOCOM. Unfortunately when it comes to discussing campaign design or command and control considerations for special operations this manual is lacking in meaningful commentary.

## Books

### Spec Ops–Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice

Admiral William McRaven's *Spec Ops–Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*, is well known as one of the first attempts to develop a theory of special operations strategy. McRaven's theory is derived from a study of eight historical special operations. He defines a special operations as one that is "conducted by forces specially trained, equipped, and supported for a specific target whose destruction, elimination, or rescue (in the case of hostages), is a political or military imperative."<sup>11</sup>

By his own admittance, McRaven's theories are all centered around direct action missions and do not fully encompass the full spectrum of potential special operations. From his eight case studies, McRaven develops the theory of relative superiority which he defines as "a condition that exists when an attacking force, generally smaller, gains a decisive advantage over a larger or well defended enemy."<sup>12</sup> By extension, he draws out six principles that support the establishment of relative superiority, simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed, and purpose. In summary, McRaven argues that the key to success in special operations is; "A simple plan, carefully concealed, repeatedly and realistically rehearsed, and executed with surprise, speed and purpose."<sup>13</sup> McRaven's

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<sup>11</sup> William H. McRaven, *SPEC OPS Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group, 1996), 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

contribution is predominantly tactical, whilst he offers a definition of special operations it is not predominantly different to the existing definitions offered by JP 3-05.

### Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terrorism

*Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terrorism* by James Kiras offers the most comprehensive and in depth discussion of special operations at the strategic level of war. Kiras explains that special operations have not been well understood. He argues that too often there is a focus on the *great raid* perspective of special operations, which has led to false assumptions about the concept of strategic paralysis.<sup>14</sup> He finds that “although intuitively dissonant, special operations and attrition are intimately linked at the strategic level.”<sup>15</sup> Special operations are about strategic attrition eroding material resources and moral resolve of the enemy. Kiras conducts a study of special operations during World War II, finding that special operations should be conducted in campaigns enabling conventional operations. “Special operations, however, are unorthodox military actions by specially trained personnel designed to achieve more than just the material whittling away of enemy forces. They are also intended to have moral effects at the operational and strategic level of war. It is the moral, or non-kinetic component of special operations that gives their material, or kinetic actions such

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<sup>14</sup> Strategic paralysis is a theory that views the enemy as an integrated system of systems. By attacking the correct nodes (or centers of gravity) within the system, strategic paralysis theory postulates that you can paralyze the entire system and defeat the enemy without the need for attrition.

<sup>15</sup> James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 115.



impact.”<sup>16</sup> Kiras is very clear that special operations are not a panacea to poor strategy. “When military action cannot achieve the goals of policy, or unforeseen complications arise, there is a danger of conducting the same mission set repeatedly over time in the hope of eventual success.”<sup>17</sup> This lack of strategy is prone to over emphasizing the tactical success of individual actions and confusing it for operational or strategic victory. Kiras discusses in his conclusion the application of special operations in contemporary operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. “There is little doubt that SOF dramatically improved the tactical performance of foreign partisans and Allied conventional forces. Tactical excellence does not necessarily equate to strategic performance, especially if the goals of strategy are ill defined or the means applied are insufficient for the ends desired.”<sup>18</sup> Finally he warns that “there is a danger that SOF might succumb to attrition, or otherwise be grossly expanded to the point that their unique qualities are diluted.”<sup>19</sup>

#### A Theory of Special Operations—The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF

Robert Spulak from the Joint Special Operations University attempted to better define the theory of special operations in the publication, *A Theory of Special Operations—The Origin, Qualities, and Use of SOF*. Spulak attempts to articulate a theory of special operations for three reasons; firstly, to help fight the current war on terrorism;

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

secondly, to guide the use of the strategic capability; and finally, to explain what institutional features help or hinder the strategic employment of SOF.<sup>20</sup> Spulak firstly looks at the limitations of military forces and identifies that the major utility of SOF is their ability to overcome, or minimize the effects of Clausewitzian ‘friction’ in war, making the risk acceptable for commanders. Spulak addresses the issue of the inherent link between special operations and the operators that conduct them, SOF. He identifies many of the attributes that enable SOF to prevail in the environment of friction and danger. It is the focus on people rather than the operations that makes Spulak’s theory different from others. Spulak argues that the careful selection of highly talented people and the extensive training they receive is one of the key decisive elements that define SOF, as well as allow them to overcome the friction of war. Ultimately he defines special operations as “missions to accomplish strategic objectives where the use of conventional forces would create unacceptable risks.”<sup>21</sup>

#### Journal Articles

##### Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?

Colin Gray provides a useful summary of the considerations surrounding the strategic utility of special operations in his article in *Parameters* in Spring 1999, “Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?” Gray discusses 11 conditions for success relating to special operations. In discussing each

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<sup>20</sup> Robert G. Spulak, *A Theory of Special Operations* (Hurlburt Field, FL: The JSOU Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

of these 11 conditions he draws on historical examples that support each premise. Gray's article is an important discussion that highlights factors for planning special operations at the strategic level of war. As Gray identifies, "failure of special operations cannot sensibly be presented as a formula, a kind of cookbook. The conditions for success identified here simply point to historical factors that increase the prospects for achievement of significant strategic effect."<sup>22</sup> Gray's conditions for success are directly relevant as they are considered for the strategic employment of special operations. The conditions are categorized as per table 1.

Table 1. Gray's 11 Conditions for Success	
<b>Special Operations: Categories of Conditions for Success</b>	
Policy Demand	Enemy Vulnerabilities
Politics	Technological Assistance
Feasible Objectives	Tactical Competence
Strategy	Reputation
Flexibility of Mind	History
Absence of Alternatives	

*Source:* Colin S. Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?" *Parameters* (Spring 1999): 3.

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<sup>22</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed?" *Parameters* (Spring 1999): 2.

According to Gray, special operations need to fit the demands of policy and these policy requirements will change over time. In particular “SOF need to change with the diminishing availability of conventional military options.”<sup>23</sup> Additionally, SOF need a tolerant political and strategic culture that is likely to employ an unconventional force. Although Gray talks mostly about civilian political acceptance and tolerance, it is equally relevant for the senior levels of the military organization. These patrons must understand the strategic value of SOF.

In assessing the use of SOF, Gray identifies the need to assign feasible objectives and to be directed by a strategically functioning defense establishment. “SOF need objectives that they can secure without the aid of regular units. It is difficult for SOF to succeed tactically, or achieve strategic utility, when commanders commit them to combat situations for which they are not suited.”<sup>24</sup> This also highlights the need for strategic level planning. Without a strategic mindset, the leadership will “fixate upon battles and campaigns neglect[ing] the realm of strategy.”<sup>25</sup> This closely aligns with the findings from Kiras, that special operations are not a replacement for a missing or poorly conceived war strategy. “Whether SOF constitute the strategy, or whether they play a team role, they need direction by a coherent theory of victory.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 9.

In the execution of special operations, Gray argues that SOF require flexibility of mind, and particularly an unconventional mentality that will allow them to either support conventional forces or operate independently. This places an emphasis on nonstandard solutions and use of surprise. Gray feels “SOF prosper when conventional operations are prohibited by political factors, ruled out as too expensive, or otherwise are deemed inappropriate.”<sup>27</sup> In order to achieve this unconventional approach and succeed where conventional forces would fail, SOF require access to leading technological assistance on top of their already existing tactical competence.

Finally, SOF require a reputation for effectiveness and a willingness to learn from history. “It is most desirable that SOF should be feared. A country cannot make a powerful political point with the menace of discrete action if SOF are incompetent or politically chained.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, it is important that a nation’s SOF are known for their tactical skill and competence, but also that the political leadership is judged to be willing to use this strategic asset in a sound and competent manner.

#### The Use of Special Operations Forces in Support of American Strategic Security Strategies

Colonel Cory M. Peterson published a short essay in the 2014 National Defense Industry Association essay contest, titled: “The Use of Special Operations Forces in Support of American Strategic Security Strategies.” Peterson, provides a robust discussion of the definition of special operations, contrasting a number of common

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 15.

definitions. He ultimately offers his own definition of special operations: “tactical activities which result in political and strategic-level effects. Special operations are conducted by highly trained and educated operators due to the significant, primarily political, risk of mission failure or exposure.”<sup>29</sup> This definition is the most effective definition because it does not confuse the definition with linking it to particular methods, rather it identifies three key elements; first, the strategic/political objective; second, the specialization of the personnel conducting the operation; and finally, the high level of risk involved in the operation. In the remainder of his essay, Peterson discusses the concept of SOF Power and its contribution to the holistic US national security strategy, placing a heavy emphasis on the utility of SOF during phase zero operations.

#### Case Study Literature

There is a wide array of literature and sources discussing the exploits of MACV–SOG. The principle literature used for this case study research was drawn from published books and other academic research studies previously conducted.

Graham A. Cosmas published a two volume official history of MACV, *MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, and *MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal 1968-1973*. These official histories are well researched and based on a detailed examination of official records and interviews with strategic and operational level commanders. The books provide a chronological description of MACVs development and operations. These books provide a limited description of SOG, its development and place within the MACV organization, although

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<sup>29</sup> Peterson, 4-5.

it does not enter into any critical analysis of SOG or the covert operations conducted during the war.

Danny M. Kelley, completed a Masters Thesis, “The Misuse of the Studies and Observations Group as a National Asset in Vietnam.” Kelley set out to discover if the covert operations conducted by SOG contributed significantly to the Vietnam War effort. Kelley sought to distil lessons that would be applicable to contemporary UW operations. In the conduct of this research, Kelley conducted oral history interviews with John L. Plaster, a retired Special Forces officer who had significant experience inside SOG; and with Major General (Ret) John K. Singlaub, the third Chief of SOG. Kelley’s thesis provides a synthesis of a number of authors on the topic of SOG as well as introducing new material from his oral history interviews.

John L. Plaster’s book *Secret Commandos*, is a firsthand account of the author’s experiences as an operator inside SOG during the Vietnam War. The book covers his selection and training for Special forces and then his subsequent three operational deployments with MACV-SOG. This is a first person account that gives the reader insights into the organization, its structure and operations. This book also provides verification of Plaster’s credentials as a reliable source on the internal workings of SOG, validating the interviews provided by Kelley’s work.

Richard H. Shultz’s book *The Secret War Against Hanoi: The Untold Story of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam*, is the most detailed and complete account of MACV-SOG. Shultz commenced his research when given access to a plethora of previously classified documents. This was augmented with multiple interviews with key personnel at all levels of the SOG, MACV and DOD organizations.

Shultz' purpose in publishing this book was to make available the lessons learnt by SOG so they can be applied to contemporary operations.<sup>30</sup> Shultz provides the most comprehensive description of SOG's structure, organization, campaign approach and integration within MACV and DOD. In particular, Shultz is the only author who provides detailed accounts of the involvement of the senior civilian political and military leadership in the planning and mission authorization process.

H. R. McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*, is a critical account of the role played by the highest levels of political leadership during the Vietnam War. McMaster finds that the Vietnam War was primarily lost in Washington DC. He is not only critical of the civilian leadership's role in the war but also the senior military leadership including General Westmoreland in MACV. McMaster's book is based on an examination of thousands of primary documentary sources, tape recordings and oral history interviews. It provides a detailed analysis of the strategic level failings during the Vietnam War, and provides an insight into the strategic direction issued and how this might have influenced the employment of SOG.

### Summary and Conclusions

All the authors reviewed in this chapter have contributed to the collective understanding of special operations strategy. This is essential to examining the factors involved in successful special operations campaigns. None of the literature sources have

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<sup>30</sup> Richard H. Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi: The Untold Story of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), x



fully articulated a complete theory of special operations strategy, often getting caught in the tactical considerations and the overall utility of SOF. Synthesizing the different perspectives presented we can see that Peterson provides us with a sound definition of special operations that focuses on the strategic utility of the capability. JP 3-05 *Special Operations*, along with the *SOF Reference Manual* provides us with a list of roles and tasks expected of SOF. McRaven provides us with his six principles of special operations that are predominantly relevant to the tactical planning and conduct of special operations rather than the planning and conduct of campaigns. Despite this tactical focus, they hold some potential relevance for standalone special operations.

The two most relevant authors on the subject of special operations campaigning are Kiras and Gray. Kiras provides us with a framework to consider the employment of SOF at the strategic level. He highlights the importance of avoiding the trap of seeking strategic paralysis via the great raid concept. Gray provides us with his 11 conditions for success relating to special operations. These 11 conditions provide us with a basis to consider and test the MACV–SOG case study against.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the employment of SOF and, through comparative analysis, identify factors contributing to strategic employment of SOF. This thesis will use a qualitative research methodology using a heuristic case study analysis of MACV–SOG operations during the Vietnam War, comparing this case study against the factors identified in the literature review. Primary and secondary source material will be examined using document analysis as part of a case study research methodology. The data validation technique will primarily be triangulation.<sup>31</sup>

#### Basis for Selecting Qualitative Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was selected in order to gain a greater depth of understanding of factors relating to the planning and execution of special operations. This research seeks to find meaning from previous experiences and to either confirm or support existing theories, or develop new theories about the planning and execution of special operations. As John W. Creswell describes, qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem.”<sup>32</sup> The case study technique is the most appropriate qualitative research technique because it allows for the holistic study of special

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<sup>31</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 208.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

operations. Sharan B. Merriam identified that: “Heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known.”<sup>33</sup> The case study methodology provides the most effective means to answer the research questions posed by this study.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study was conducted by analyzing a variety of primary and secondary source documents. Primary sources were drawn mainly from the official documents recording NSC meetings and Presidential orders issued at the time. Secondary sources, synthesize official records, interviews and observations are also used. These included published books, monographs and journal articles—providing greater saturation of data to draw conclusions from.

This qualitative research study uses a single case study of the MACV–SOG to conduct a comparative analysis against the findings from the literature review. This case study was specifically selected to be outside of the author’s personnel experience, so as to avoid author bias due to close involvement. As an Australian Army Special Forces Officer, the author has nine years of experience in planning and conducting special operations as both stand-alone operations and as part of wider conventional campaigns. This basis of knowledge supports the analysis applied to the data, especially when making interpretations and judgments.

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<sup>33</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 30.

The MACV-SOG case study is an example of a long running special operation campaign involving both clandestine and covert operations during the Vietnam War. It provides an example of a unilateral US special operations that predominantly conducted unconventional warfare, special reconnaissance and direct action as part of a wider conventional military campaign. Due to the age of the case study, official classified documentation has been declassified and made available. Additionally, previous authors have conducted in-depth interviews with participants and documented these actions in a number of published books and peer reviewed journals.

### Research Questions

This qualitative research study answers the following questions:

1. What is the role and missions of SOF?
2. How should special operations campaigns integrate into wider conventional campaigns?
3. How should special operations campaigns be commanded and controlled?

### Coding

Coding is a method to categorize and organize the data collected.<sup>34</sup> The process of coding began with the conduct of the literature review which categorized the background literature to identify applicable theory on special operations. The case study data is categorized using the research questions, assigning it to categories that support the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 164.

answering of those specific secondary questions. Additionally, the case study data is organized to answer the case study factors:

1. What is the context and key events surrounding the case study?
2. What was the role that SOF were used for?
3. What was the command and control structure?

This process of coding allows for the tracking of thoughts, speculations and hunches that supports the analysis of the data.<sup>35</sup>

### Standards of Quality and Verification

The data quality and verification techniques used in this study center upon saturation of appropriate primary and secondary sources. Multiple sources are used for the case study to ensure truthfulness of the accounts. Triangulation as referred to by Creswell<sup>36</sup> is used to ensure the credibility and validity of the data used for qualitative assessments.

### Summary

This chapter has described the research methodology used in the conduct of this qualitative research study. The purpose of the thesis is to examine the employment of SOF using a comparative analysis of the MACV–SOG case study against the findings from the literature review. This comparative analysis has allowed for the identification of factors that contribute to the effective employment of SOF at the strategic level of war.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>36</sup> Creswell, 208.

This methodology was selected because it allows for an in-depth analysis and understanding of the topic. “Qualitative research can reveal how all parts work together to form a whole.”<sup>37</sup> The data used in the research is a mixture of primary and secondary documentary sources, allowing for data saturation of the case study. This data has been coded using the research questions to organize the data ensuring sufficient saturation and triangulation amongst the source material. The following chapter presents the analysis of this data collection.

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<sup>37</sup> Merriam, 6.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

This chapter gathers and presents the analysis of the data used in the qualitative case study research. Whilst the outcome of the Vietnam War was generally considered unsuccessful for the United States, this case study provides a multitude of evidence to review and test the considerations that Kiras and Gray articulated for planning and conducting strategic special operations campaigns.

#### Background

In mid-1963, under the direction of President John F. Kennedy, The SOG was established to conduct a paramilitary campaign inside North Vietnam. Kennedy had formed the belief, that to create favorable conditions in South Vietnam, it was necessary to destabilize the communist regime in the north. This was to include the development of spy networks, psychological warfare, maritime interdiction and cross-border reconnaissance.<sup>38</sup> In National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 52 Kennedy made clear that all elements of national power were being considered including “actions of . . . psychological and covert character.”<sup>39</sup> These types of covert and paramilitary operations

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<sup>38</sup> Frank D. Razzano, “The Necessity for the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam Studies and Observations Group” (Master’s Thesis, Command and General Staff College, 2015), 15.

<sup>39</sup> Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series. National Security Action Memorandum Number 52. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, accessed April 6, 2016,

had traditionally been conducted by the CIA, having inherited the responsibility from the CIA's predecessor, the OSS. In NSAM 57, Kennedy issued a new direction that resulted in the expansion of paramilitary capabilities in DOD and ultimately the establishment of SOG.

Any large paramilitary operation wholly or partly covert which requires significant numbers of military trained personnel, amounts of military equipment which exceeds normal CIA-controlled stocks and/or military experience of a kind and level peculiar to the Armed Services is properly the primary responsibility of the Department of Defense with the CIA in a supporting role.<sup>40</sup>

Kennedy's decision to transfer the responsibility for large scale covert action to the DOD was influenced by recent failures of the CIA. Kennedy had directed the CIA to increase their covert actions in North Vietnam. However, the CIA had not been able to infiltrate agents into the north and develop effective agent networks. "In the midst of this lethargic response to Kennedy's Vietnam directives, the Bay of Pigs fiasco unfolded. It was another CIA flop against a denied area and a huge political embarrassment for the president."<sup>41</sup> Despite the enthusiasm that NSAM 57 reflected from the civilian leadership towards the conduct of covert and paramilitary action by the DOD, the JCS did not share the enthusiasm. The newly appointed Chairman of the JCS, General Maxwell Taylor attempted to avoid responsibility and requested that "the CIA be directed to initiate a

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<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/National-Security-Memoranda.aspx>.

<sup>40</sup> Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series. National Security Action Memorandum Number 57. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum Boston, accessed April 6, 2016, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/National-Security-Memoranda.aspx>.

<sup>41</sup> Shultz, 19.



greatly intensified covert effort against targets in North Vietnam.”<sup>42</sup> In May of 1963, Pacific Command was finally directed by the SECDEF, Robert McNamara, to develop a plan for covert actions in Vietnam.<sup>43</sup> Pacific Command developed OPLAN 34A, which proposed over 2000 different activities in three ascending categories of scale and severity. This plan included special reconnaissance, direct action raids/sabotage, and psychological operations.<sup>44</sup>

SOG was established under OPLAN 34A, that expanded the previously existing CIA clandestine efforts and placed them under DOD command.<sup>45</sup> SOG operated from 1964 until its disbandment on 30 April 1972.<sup>46</sup> SOG was commanded by an Army Colonel and embedded in the MACV headquarters directly under the Chief of Staff.<sup>47</sup> As such, SOG was responsible for planning and conducting a special operations campaign in support of MACV. The campaign included four primary lines of effort, which varied at times during the conflict, but were broadly divided into: covert maritime operations, black psychological warfare, covert operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and SOG

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>44</sup> Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2006), 160.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>46</sup> Shultz, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Cosmas, *MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 133.

support activities.<sup>48</sup> “The Studies and Observations Group commanded some 2,500 American military personnel and 7,000 indigenous irregulars who conducted platoon and company-size attacks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and performed espionage and propaganda missions—none very successful—in North Vietnam.”<sup>49</sup>

Ultimately MACV–SOG was unable to produce results that had a significant effect on the strategic outcome of the Vietnam War. “The goals of the State Department, other government agencies, conventional military, and unconventional military were never linked. They did not support each other in a unified effort.”<sup>50</sup> Although SOG’s objectives were never specifically stated, they revolved around blocking the Ho Chi Minh Trail and causing instability in the North Vietnamese rear area—neither of these goals were achieved.

#### Context and Key Events Surrounding MACV–SOG

Any understanding of the US military involvement in Vietnam must be grounded in an understanding of the differences between Kennedy, McNamara, and Johnson’s limited war theory approach and the theory of massive retaliation. Massive retaliation theory was President Eisenhower’s primary national security policy. Massive retaliation or “total war involved using the full use of America’s conventional and nuclear arsenal

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<sup>48</sup> Shultz, 58-70.

<sup>49</sup> Cosmas, *MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Danny M. Kelley, “The Misuse of the Studies and Observation Group as a National asset in Vietnam” (Master’s Thesis, Command and General Staff College, 2005), 52.

for any war-like act by a belligerent state.”<sup>51</sup> The problem with the massive retaliation theory was that it was not proportional. Kennedy, who supported taking action to protect South Vietnam, considered a wide range of actions to undermine the communist regime in North Vietnam. NSAM 52 demonstrates Kennedy’s resolve to prevent communist domination of South Vietnam including expanding covert and psychological operations.

“In the early stages of the covert operations campaign, 1961-63, the CIA took the lead. CIA efforts included operations conducted inside South Vietnam and those directed against North Vietnam.”<sup>52</sup> The CIA emphasis was placed on the borders of South Vietnam, despite Kennedy's guidance to develop a guerilla movement in North Vietnam. The CIA activities in South Vietnam centered on political action, paramilitary, and counterterror.<sup>53</sup> “NSAM 55, 56, and 57 illustrated Kennedy's dissatisfaction with the CIA and his determination to develop the operational means to conduct UW against North Vietnam and other denied areas.”<sup>54</sup>

The JCS did not share the enthusiasm for paramilitary operations. In an effort to control the issue, the Pentagon formed the office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) to provide oversight of unconventional warfare operations. Most military officers at the time had little to no experience in special operations and unconventional warfare and they “saw it as a passing

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Shultz, 21.

fancy. This applied as well to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), which was formed by Secretary of Defense McNamara on 8 February 1962 to coordinate operational level missions as a sub-unified command under the Commander in Chief, Pacific.”<sup>55</sup> This lack of interest, and at times open disregard for SOG, resulted in the assignment of inappropriate officers to positions within SOG—this was to have an impact on the success of SOG operations.

North Vietnam’s strategy to fight a revolutionary war to liberate the south was heavily influenced by Mao’s model for a revolutionary war. The north needed to develop guerilla forces that could harass the security forces in the south and build their support and capacity to move into the third phase of revolutionary war, fighting as a conventional force. This strategy required the building, training and sustaining of guerilla forces. “One North Vietnamese center of gravity that MACVSOG sought to disrupt was rear area stability and security inside North Vietnam. The second center of gravity MACVSOG targeted was the logistical supply network, command and control structure, and troop staging areas along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Cambodia, one of Hanoi’s most strategic assets for conducting the war.”<sup>56</sup>

#### The Role of MACV–SOG

SOG was structured and established to conduct four principle missions: inserting and running agents, covert maritime interdiction, psychological warfare and cross-border

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<sup>55</sup> Kelley, 43.

<sup>56</sup> Shultz, xiv.

reconnaissance.<sup>57</sup> As the organization grew, its structure changed and became more complex, but at its core remained four operational sections. Each of these sections had planning and operations responsibility for one of the principle missions.<sup>58</sup>

These four principle missions were in effect the lines of effort that together constituted the SOG campaign plan. The first principle mission, agent networks and deception involved recruiting and inserting long-term agent teams into North Vietnam. This was the responsibility of SOG's Airborne Operations Group. This mission had been inherited from the CIA, although they had not achieved any significant results. Covert maritime operations was SOG's second core mission. This mission was also inherited from the CIA, it was the responsibility of the Maritime Operations Group. The third mission, psychological warfare, was a deniable operation and termed *black* because the communications or actions emanated from falsely attributed or non-attributed sources. These operations were targeted against the population of North Vietnam. The final principle mission was covert operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This involved American-led covert reconnaissance team operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos.<sup>59</sup> “The decision to execute this mission was an agonizing one for the Johnson administration. It took nearly two years to decide to “cross the fence,” as SOG men called operations in Laos.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 54-69.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 70.

SOG's four principle missions were supported by three specialized support sections—air, logistics and communications. The Air Studies Group planned air support for SOG operations and activities. The Air Studies Group was also the operational arm, operating helicopters, tactical aircraft, transport aircraft and forward air controllers in support of SOG missions. The Air Studies Group operated from bases in Vietnam and Thailand. Additionally, SOG used third-country pilots operating unmarked aircraft on missions into North Vietnam.<sup>61</sup> The Logistics Division provided logistical support to all aspects of SOG's operations including the provision of enemy uniforms and weapons.<sup>62</sup> The third SOG support section was its Communications Division. This division provided critical support to all missions. It provided advanced cryptographic equipment to maintained secure traffic with SOG operatives in the field.<sup>63</sup>

#### Command and Control Structure

The command and control of MACV–SOG reflected both the strategic purpose of the organization as well as the organizational resistance to its existence. The organization was embedded in the highest level of MACV, as a direct command group answering to the Chief of Staff.<sup>64</sup> Internally, SOG was a joint and interagency command, Commanded by an Army colonel, it had an Air Force deputy and CIA Chief of Staff. The commander

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>64</sup> Cosmas, *MACV The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 133.

of SOG “Known as the chief of MACVSOG, [had] a background in special warfare activities. If SOG was to be integrated into overall U.S. strategy for fighting the Vietnam War, its chief also had to be adept at operating among senior leadership at MACV and JCS. He needed access to the brass and had to be seen as a member of their club. Otherwise, SOG could easily become peripheral and unrelated to the main war effort.”<sup>65</sup> The allocation of a colonel rather than a general officer to this position reflected the subversive attitude that existed within the Pentagon towards special operations, this imposed significant hurdles on the organization's effectiveness.<sup>66</sup>

The authorization process for SOG's operations reflected the strategic nature of the organization. All activities were managed directly by SACSA. “[SACSA] kept a close hold on SOG activities for a small number of the most senior military and civilian officials in the Pentagon.”<sup>67</sup> In his book, *The Secret War against Hanoi*, Shultz interviewed Commander William Murray who was an action officer in SACSA in 1964-66. He provides a firsthand account of the operations approval process used for SOG:

[A]ll requests by MACVSOG for authorization to execute a package of missions “usually arrived through a very restricted crypto[graphic] system with distribution only to SACSA.” They would take the request and turn it into a “regular Joint Chiefs of Staff [action] paper with limited distribution to only certain officials. . . . All of this was accomplished in an incredibly short time when compared to other routine Joint Chiefs of Staff papers.” Thus, once . . . SACSA . . . approved a paper prepared by the Special Operations Division, it was sent directly to JCS Chairman Wheeler. Having reviewed the action paper, Wheeler might initial the request on the spot, or he could take it to the chiefs for review before signing off on it.

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<sup>65</sup> Shultz, 50.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 290.

Once the chairman had initialed the paper the SACSA action officer walked the request for review to either Secretary of Defense McNamara or his deputy, Cyrus Vance. During 1964 most SOG requests went to McNamara, who “usually initialed it right off.”

Following approval by the Pentagon, the next stop for a SACSA action officer in 1964 was . . . the White House. After either McNamara or Vance had initialed the action paper, [the SACSA action officer] got into a waiting car at the E ring [entrance to the Pentagon] and was driven to the State Department, where he would take the action paper to Secretary Rusk. He recalls one occasion "when Secretary Rusk was departing for an official function and LI was] chasing him down the corridor. The importance of these operations can be gathered by the fact that Rusk stopped, saw what I was carrying, and we stepped into a convenient office where he read and initialed the approval.”

Once Rusk added his signature, [the SACSA action officer] was back in the car. For his next stop he went to McGeorge Bundy's office, the national security adviser. Generally, he gave the action paper directly to Bundy. He “usually asked me a few simple questions . . . read the paper and initialed it.” However, this did not always end the process. On several occasions Bundy told [the SACSA action officer]: “You go back to your office and when I get approval upstairs I will give you a call. Those initials [on the action paper] are not good enough for release until you get a call, my call, understood?” [the SACSA action officer] would return to the Pentagon to await the telephone call . . . Only then could the action officer take the release message to the communication center, and it was sent operational immediate' [top priority] to MACVSOG.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to this approval process was the requirement for all operations being conducted across the border in Cambodia or Laos to be approved by the US ambassador in the respective country. “As an example, SOG led forces could not penetrate Laos until the fall of 1965, almost fifteen months after the unit was formed. Furthermore, after these operations were finally approved, US Ambassador to Laos Sullivan<sup>69</sup> limited SOG operations to within a few kilometers over the border and restricted the use of US aircraft. Throughout SOG's existence, Ambassador Sullivan hampered SOG-s efforts against the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 293-294.

<sup>69</sup> William H. Sullivan, US Ambassador to Laos 1964-69.



Ho Chi Minh Trail. Later in 1967 SOG was allowed to operate against the trail in Cambodia.”<sup>70</sup>

### Integration of SOG into the Conventional Campaign

There is a lot of literature that reviews and discusses the US military strategy in Vietnam. It is not the purpose of this thesis to conduct a detailed analysis of the conventional military strategy other than how it related to the employment of SOG. Ultimately, the lack of an operational level approach from MACV directly hindered SOG’s employment. As H. R. McMaster noted:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff became accomplices in the President's deception and focused on a tactical task, killing the enemy. General Westmoreland's "strategy" of attrition in South Vietnam, was, in essence, the absence of strategy. The result was military activity (bombing North Vietnam and killing the enemy in South Vietnam) that did not aim to achieve a clearly defined objective.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the lack of an articulated military strategy, SOG did have direction on what it was to achieve, the four principle missions: inserting and running agents, covert maritime interdiction, psychological warfare and cross-border reconnaissance.<sup>72</sup> SOG’s strategy centered on denying or at least neutralizing North Vietnam’s ability to destabilize the South by causing instability in the North and denying use of the sanctuary areas and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Although the wider MACV operational approach was tactical and focused inside South Vietnam, SOG’s campaign approach appears to have

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<sup>70</sup> Kelley, 50-51.

<sup>71</sup> H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1997), 333.

<sup>72</sup> Shultz, x.

been a suitable approach from the point of view of supporting MACV. Unfortunately, “tactical excellence does not necessarily equate to strategic performance, especially if the goals of strategy are ill defined or the means applied are insufficient for the ends desired.”<sup>73</sup>

Shultz identified that for SOG to integrate their campaign approach they would need to have both access and acceptance by the military leadership, especially in MACV.

For MACVSOG to make a significant contribution to U.S. strategy, access to the MACV and Joint Chiefs of Staff planning process was essential. Otherwise, the senior military leadership would have little or no understanding or interest in the potential value of covert operations against North Vietnam. [Colonel] Clyde Russell [the first chief of SOG] had no such entree with the senior Army leadership in MACV or the Joint Staff.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore Russell’s replacement, Colonel Donald D. Blackburn, during his one-year tour as chief of SOG, briefed Westmoreland only once.<sup>75</sup> This demonstrated that despite being physically located within MACV, SOG was not integrated—not helped by the stove piped approval process that did not include MACV.

#### Analysis of Gray’s 11 Conditions

The MACV–SOG special operations campaign conducted from 1964- 1972 provides examples that illustrate the conditions for the successful conduct of special operations. In particular the case study confirms many of Gray’s assertions relating to: SOF responding to policy demands; an environment where politics is understanding and

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<sup>73</sup> Kiras, 117.

<sup>74</sup> Shultz, 51.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 53.

supportive of SOF; the feasibility of SOF's objectives; the presence of a suitable war winning strategy; exploitation of enemy vulnerabilities, and the requirement for flexibility of mind.

As we could see by the direction issued from Kennedy in NSAMs 52, 56 and 57 that at the highest levels of policy there existed a demand and support for special operations. This policy demand and political support was a critical component in ensuring the formation of SOG. The attempts by the JCS to avoid taking on responsibility for paramilitary actions were only circumvented by the efforts of the SECDEF to force the military into developing OPLAN 34A. The policy demand is also demonstrated by the forming of the 303 Committee, a top level committee established in the White House specifically to control covert actions.<sup>76</sup> There are two places where we see the divergence of this policy demand, the first is within the Pentagon and the other is with individual US ambassadors, particularly William H. Sullivan in Laos who blocked SOG operations and placed heavy restrictions on them.<sup>77</sup>

“In the United States, the American way of war has not accommodated SOF as an important strategic instrument.”<sup>78</sup> The Pentagon's response to NSAM 57 clearly demonstrated the disdain for special operations. The senior staff in the Pentagon did everything they could to neutralize the president's direction.<sup>79</sup> The Army Chief of Staff,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>77</sup> Kelley, 50-51.

<sup>78</sup> Gray, “Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures,” 4.

<sup>79</sup> Shultz, 271.

General George Decker stated that “any good soldier can handle guerrillas.”<sup>80</sup> Both the senior staff in the Pentagon and MACV did not consider SOG’s campaign part of an integrated strategy. General William C. Westmoreland and his successor, General Creighton W. Abrams Jr., ignored SOG and almost never spoke with the Chief of SOG.<sup>81</sup> Without the support and desire from the strategic level military leadership, SOG appeared to have always been destined for failure. This reinforces Gray’s comment that “SOF need an educated consumer, political and military patrons who appreciate what SOF should, and should not, be asked to do.”<sup>82</sup>

SOG was never formally assigned objectives and with the absence of a MACV operational level campaign plan, there was no effective oversight to ensure feasible objective were pursued. SOG’s campaign centered on the two operational objectives: firstly, targeting Hanoi’s internal security and control of the population; and secondly, denying use of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.<sup>83</sup> Both these objectives were unsuitable for SOG given the capability and capacity resident within SOG and because of the lack of integration within a higher campaign. As Kiras highlighted, “special operations are useful adjuncts to conventional forces but are rarely, if ever, decisive in and of themselves.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>82</sup> Gray, “Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures,” 4.

<sup>83</sup> Shultz, 70.

<sup>84</sup> Kiras, 79.

The first objective, targeting Hanoi's internal security and control of the population, relied heavily on the SOG core missions of insertion of agent teams and deception programs, along with the black psychological warfare operations. It should have been evident given the CIA's previous experience with attempting to recruit agents in North Vietnam that this was not a feasible objective,<sup>85</sup> and did not exploit a true enemy vulnerability. North Vietnam did not possess the level of dissatisfaction and resistance that would be required to infiltrate agents for long-term intelligence collection and sabotage operations.

The second objective of SOG, denying use of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, was unattainable because it was outside SOG's capacity. SOG offered valuable contributions to achieving this objective, but they were never going to be able to achieve it alone. The terrain involved, the enemy's counter measures and the lack of approval for deep cross border operations made it impossible for SOG teams to achieve their objectives.<sup>86</sup> SOG was able to achieve harassment of North Vietnamese forces and did necessitate the enemy increasing its security on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Unfortunately, without a large conventional ground force element, it was unachievable for SOG to deny the trail.

Both SOG's operational failures, and those of MACV, resulted predominantly from the lack of military strategic planning. "General Westmoreland's strategy of attrition

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<sup>85</sup> For example, during the period 1961-63, the CIA attempted to infiltrate more than thirty agent teams into North Vietnam with only four not becoming either captured, killed or turned into double agents. Shultz, 29.

<sup>86</sup> William Rosenau, *Special Operations Forces and Elusive Enemy Ground Targets: Lessons from Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), ix.

in South Vietnam, was, in essence, the absence of strategy.”<sup>87</sup> Gray argues that the American way of war barely addresses low-intensity conflict,<sup>88</sup> favoring the use of overwhelming firepower. The end result was the absence of an effective strategic and operational approach. In its place MACV pursued tactical engagements and used metrics such as body counts to track their progress. In this environment, it is not surprising that SOG failed to achieve either of its two objectives. As Kiras points out:

Although special operations have considerable utility and enhance military effectiveness, those qualities alone do not guarantee improved strategic performance. No amount of skill or unorthodoxy can offset poor strategic choices, such as a mismatch between desired ends and specified means, political intransigence, poor timing, and inadequate military preparation or action.<sup>89</sup>

“The successful conduct of unconventional warfare requires a state of mind that can innovate nonstandard solutions to problems.”<sup>90</sup> SOG suffered at the hands of a higher headquarters that did not possess this flexibility of mind. As a result MACV dismissed SOG and failed to engage them in any meaningful way. SOG needed the ability to support the conventional operations as well as performing independent tasks. The established operations approval process that was disconnected from MACV and highly inflexible did not support the effective employment throughout the war. The approval process might have been appropriate for some of the most politically sensitive operations,

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<sup>87</sup> McMaster, 333.

<sup>88</sup> Gray, “Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures,” 4.

<sup>89</sup> Kiras, 80.

<sup>90</sup> Gray, “Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures,” 10.

but undoubtedly this Washington DC based approvals chain further disconnected SOG from MACV.

### Summary

MACV–SOG was established as a result of direction from the President. It had the backing of the senior civilian leadership and marked an important development in the capability of the DOD to conduct covert operations. Despite the support from the civilian leadership, the majority of the military organization was suspicious and in some cases hostile to the concept of special operations. This divide at the most senior levels was to have a detrimental impact on the utility of SOG. Despite these issues, SOG was resourced and established, conducting its four principle lines of effort: agent networks and deception, covert maritime operations, psychological warfare, and covert operations against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. These lines of effort were appropriate especially with the lack of campaign planning direction from MACV. The approval process for SOG operations was disconnected from MACV and time consuming causing both delays and frustration.

Ultimately, MACV–SOG was unable to achieve either of its objectives, destabilizing North Vietnam, or denying use of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This case study of a special operations campaign as part of a wider conventional operation clearly supports many of the theories put forward by Gray and Kiras. In particular, the issues of policy demands and the political environment, both civilian and military, surrounding the employment of SOF. It illustrates the importance of assigning feasible objectives, and objectives that are part of a coherent war-winning strategy. It also reinforces Kiras' assertion that rarely are special operations decisive in their own right—they must be

integrated into an overall strategy. Finally the case study illustrated the importance of a flexible mind, not only within the SOF organization but also within the senior military and civilian leadership. Without this flexibility, SOF cannot respond with the speed surprise and purpose required to meet the demands of a good strategy.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding how special operations contribute to improving strategic performance is the cognitive lynchpin in preventing their misuse.

— James Kiras

#### Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine special operations campaigning to identify factors that might contribute to the effective employment of SOF as a strategic capability. This research is important because SOF are expensive to raise and train, they are a limited resource, and typically their employment is inherently high in strategic risk. The literature review identified a number of theorists who have contributed to this area of study. In particular, the work of James Kiras and Colin Gray provide the most comprehensive theory on the strategic employment of SOF. Although other authors were helpful in describing special operations, they tended to concentrate on tactical employment rather than advancing theories of strategic utility. The case study of MACV–SOG is a good example of a SOF campaign in support of a conventional theater of operation. Although the results achieved by MACV–SOG were mixed, they ultimately did not achieve their strategic objective. Nevertheless, MACV–SOG illustrates many of the points relating to the strategic employment of SOF raised by Kiras and Gray. The conclusions of this qualitative research study are examined according to the research questions.

### What Are the Roles and Missions of SOF?

There are a number of doctrinal publications, journal articles and books that provide definitions of special operations. The most effective definition was that provided by Peterson. Special operations are “tactical activities which result in political and strategic-level effects. Special operations are conducted by highly trained and educated operators due to the significant, primarily political, risk of mission failure or exposure.”<sup>91</sup> The strength of this definition is the focus on the objective of special operations rather than the techniques used. For SOF to continue to achieve operational surprise, and to innovate in a constantly changing environment, they must continue to change their tactical techniques and approaches. This supports Gray’s fifth condition for success, flexibility of mind. This condition places an emphasis on non-standard and unconventional approaches to solving problems—a key to success.

JP 3-05 *Special Operations*, describes the broad categories of special operations identifying 12 core activities: direct action, special reconnaissance, countering weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, security force assistance, hostage rescue and recovery, counterinsurgency, foreign humanitarian assistance, military information operations and civil affairs operations. These categorizations are not perfect because they switch between categorizing an activity by the objective (i.e. hostage recovery) or the technique used (i.e. direct action). There is a danger in focusing too much on categorizing and defining types of special operations. For SOF to continue to answer the demands of policy and achieve success in

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<sup>91</sup> Peterson, 4-5.

an ever changing environment, they will need to constantly evolve both their mission sets and their tasks. Prior to Kennedy's direction in NSAM 57, US Army Special Forces did not possess the tactical skills and tasks that are now required of them by the new policy demand. Flexibility of mind allows SOF to adapt to the situation rather than be constrained by doctrine.

### How Should Special Operations Campaigns be Integrated into Wider Conventional Campaigns?

MACV-SOG provides a clear example of poor integration of a special operations campaign within a conventional theater campaign. This occurred on three levels: firstly the disconnection caused by retaining approval authority for SOG operations in Washington DC. This effectively dislocated SOG from the theater level strategy as well as causing significant delays—limiting SOG's operational agility. The second level occurred at MACV, with the poor integration of SOG due to organizational resistance and disdain for SOF. At this theater campaign level, SOG was also victim to the absence of an effective theater level strategy to win the war. Finally, SOG's campaign lacked integration due to the frictions at the interagency level. The requirement for DOS and US Ambassador approvals for all cross border operations further isolated SOG's campaign. Additionally, there was distrust and resentment between SOG and CIA originating from the effects of NSAM 57.

The case study highlights Kiras' point that "special operations are useful adjuncts to conventional forces but rarely, if ever, decisive in and of themselves."<sup>92</sup> There

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<sup>92</sup> Kiras, 79.

appeared to be a belief, at the most senior political levels, that covert and clandestine operations were an essential part of the effort to defeat North Vietnam. This belief was probably correct, but this never transferred to the theater campaign. Failing to integrate SOG with the conventional theater campaign subverted the entire effort. Holding the operations approval process above MACV effectively disconnected their effects and limited SOG's utility to the point of failure.

MACV-SOG needed to be placed under the command of MACV, particularly for the operational approval process. This would have engaged MACV and provided a mechanism to integrate the two campaigns. This action, by itself, was unlikely to have solved the entire problem. To have effectively integrated the campaigns, the senior military leadership needed to understand special operations. They required education on special operations theory and SOF capabilities. This education needed to have been supported with the placement of senior SOF advisors within theater level organizations. Additionally, the Chief of SOG needed to be a general officer appointment. This also raises the question of how much the American way of war,<sup>93</sup> created a cognitive bias within the Pentagon and MACV-limiting the utility of SOG.

Even with effective integration of SOG, their utility was always going to be victim of the lack of a theater level strategy to win the war. "Special Operations improve

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<sup>93</sup> For a full examination of The American way of war see Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1973), 466. Weigley describes that under General Westmoreland the unconventional warfare strategy proposed by Kennedy had "fallen into the discard." Additionally, Gray argues that the American way of war is "profoundly regular." See Colin S. Gray, *Irregular Enemies and The Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), 42.

performance by increasing the military effectiveness of friendly forces, accomplishing political and military objectives in a timely, economic manner, but also upsetting the adversary's strategic and operational calculus.”<sup>94</sup> The evidence suggests that the leadership of MACV never effectively planned at a holistic strategic level.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the lack of strategic direction, SOG still developed their own campaign and vigorously pursued the four lines of effort, undertaking many incredible tactical actions. This highlights the bias for action that is inherent within SOF. In the absence of strategic direction, SOG sought opportunities to act. Unfortunately the objectives they pursued were often inappropriate given their capabilities and lack of integration with the theater level campaign.

#### How Should Special Operations Campaigns be Commanded and Controlled?

Special operations must be commanded and controlled at the highest levels, but unless they are a standalone operation such as hostage recovery, they must be under the authority of the theater commander. SOG appeared on organizational diagrams as a direct command unit of MACV, but the reality was that they were removed from the MACV organization due to the operations approval process.

SOF are a limited resource, designed for utility at the strategic level of war. Rarely will they be decisive by themselves but through integration into a theater campaign they have a significant contribution to make. The retention of operational

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> McMaster, 333.

approval at the SECDEF and Presidential levels was inappropriate for SOG. This level of command might be appropriate for a standalone operation such as a counter proliferation of WMD mission or hostage recovery operation, but not for an extended campaign in support of wider objectives.

### What Factors Contribute to SOF Campaigns Achieving Effective Results and Strategic Objectives?

The MACV–SOG case study used in this research highlights a number of factors that would contribute to special operations campaigns achieving effective results. These factors triangulate with the theories of Gray and Kiras, but as Gray points out: “one can neither specify conditions that guarantee success nor identify the circumstances that guarantee failure.”<sup>96</sup> From the case study the following factors appear to be critical.

SOF require an environment of good  
integrated strategic thought.

Special operations campaigns must be part of a wider theater level strategy, which assigns suitable objectives and integrates the special operations effects with the wider campaign using SOF to achieve moral and or mental attrition on the enemy. As Gray expressed it; “SOF need a stable overall war strategy to which they can contribute.”<sup>97</sup>

SOF require an educated and informed client.

The political and military leaders must have an understanding of special operations theory. In particular they must be educated on the capabilities of their SOF.

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<sup>96</sup> Gray, “Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures,” 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 9.

This education must be supported with an effective network of specialist advisors to provide advice and recommendations on the suitability of special operations. It was clear that in MACV the chief of SOG was not considered an advisor to commander given the anecdotal evidence that the chief of SOG only ever spoke to the MACV commander once or twice during an operational tour.

SOF must be well educated on their strategic utility.

This education must be internal to SOF organizations. SOF are masters of their trade and have a bias for action, but this must be tempered with an understanding of the strategic utility that they serve. The self-developed campaign executed by SOG demonstrates that danger of SOF over emphasizing their individual capability. This is the central thesis of Kiras book. SOF are rarely decisive by themselves, they must be integrated into the wider campaign. SOG's objectives of destabilizing the North and denying the Ho Chi Minh Trail were never achievable objectives.

Special operations must be commanded at  
the highest level in theater

Conceivably, the most problematic issue for SOG was their command and control structures. The operational approval chain was dislocated from the theater of operations. This caused significant delays in gaining approvals, therefore limiting SOG's adaptability and agility. More problematic was the way this command and control arrangement isolated SOG from the theater level of command. What cannot be discounted when considering the causes of the SOG and MACV disconnect, is the American military culture of distrust and resistance to special operations. This resistance originated all the way from the JCS to the theater level commanders and caused the creation of oversight

committees that were designed to contain covert action rather than integrate it. This highlights the importance that organizational culture plays in the effective employment of SOF as a strategic asset.

### Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify potential recommendations that would be applicable to the Australia Special Operations Command. Although MACV-SOG was a US only organization, there are many similarities between the US experience and that of Australia which make the lessons applicable to both countries. In the author's experience, the issues of cultural resistance to special operations is also present in the Australian context. Likewise the national security architectures of both Australia and the United States, being based on representational democracies, are very similar. Finally, the doctrine, capabilities, and approach of the two SOF organizations are very comparable.

Australia should focus on the education of operational and strategic planners and leaders, to ensure they are educated on the purpose, planning considerations and capabilities of SOF. This education should be continuously reinforced during the officer training continuum with the outcome being that any planning officer is capable of including SOF effects within an operational approach. This education does not need to include tactics or techniques but should provide a detailed understanding of SOF effects in the same way all officers understand the effects an infantry battalion can achieve.

Australian SOF professional education should increase its focus on strategic theory, particularly the strategic utility of special operations. This education should include the theories of Kiras and Gray. Furthermore, the capstone special operations



doctrine should be updated to reflect the focus on special operations campaigns and their integration with theater campaigns. The doctrine should also address the central ideas proposed by Kiras, avoiding the trap of seeking strategic paralysis and integrating special operations into a theater strategy.

In all operations that have a SOF component, the theater headquarters should be provided with a special operations advisor and planner in place of the existing special operations liaison officer. The purpose of this change is to enable a conventional theater commander with the ability to properly consider special operations within a theater campaign plan. This individual must be appropriately experienced in special operations, be of a suitable rank to advise and influence the theater commander, and must be highly competent. In circumstances where the SOF component is collocated with the theater commander, that SOF component commander could undertake this function. This concept should include upgrading the existing liaison officer in headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

Finally, Australia should retain the practice of commanding special operations at the highest level of command in theater. This ensures that the effects of SOF operations are focused at the strategic level and the limited SOF resource is not inappropriately employed on tactical objectives.

#### Areas for Further Research

The MACV–SOG case study provides significant utility as an example of a special operations campaign. There would be utility in conducting a similar comparative analysis with special operations campaigns conducted during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both these conflicts provide examples of special operations in support of a wider conventional campaign. Additionally these case studies might offer new insights

because of the changes implemented under the Goldwater Nicholls Act, which included the establishment of Special Operations Command as a Unified Combatant Command.

Late in the formulation of this thesis, the author discovered a number of official CIA historical books, documenting CIA operations in South East Asia during the period of the Vietnam War.<sup>98</sup> These books were classified until 2009, when redacted editions were made available to the public. These books show potential evidence of the disregard for NSAM 57 and Kennedy's guidance for all covert action to transfer to DOD control. None of the sources used in this study examined in detail the frictions caused between CIA and SOG. Further research into the topic of CIA operations and their impact on the effectiveness of SOG operations would be beneficial in identifying themes and lessons that are directly applicable to contemporary interagency issues.

The other recommended area for further research is the issues surrounding the American way of war and its dislike of SOF.<sup>99</sup> Testing the validity of this theory in the post-Goldwater Nicholls era as well as understanding the potential origins of this culture could offer recommendations for how to overcome the culture and better integrate special operations into theater level strategy.

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<sup>98</sup> Thomas L. Ahern, *The Way We Do Things: Black Entry Operations into North Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005); Thomas L. Ahern, *Undercover Armies: CIA and Surrogate Warfare in Laos* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2006).

<sup>99</sup> Gray, *Irregular Enemies and The Essence of Strategy*, 42.

## GLOSSARY<sup>100</sup>

Civil Affairs Operations (CAO). CAO enhance the relationship between military and civil authorities. CAO require coordination with other governmental agencies, international governmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, indigenous populations and institutions, and the private sector. CAO include population and resource control, FHA, nation assistance, support to civil administrations, and civil information management. CAO performed in support of special operations are characterized by smaller CA teams or elements, generally without the support of larger military forces, acting in isolated, austere, and, in many cases, politically sensitive environments.

Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD). CWMD refers to nonproliferation (NP), counter proliferation (CP), and WMD consequence management. WMD are chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons capable of a high order of destruction or causing mass casualties. CWMD excludes the means of transporting or propelling the weapons where such means is a separable and divisible part from the weapons. SOF have a role primarily in NP and CP by providing expertise, materiel, and teams to support GCCs to locate, tag, and track WMD; conducting interdiction and other offensive operations in limited areas as required; building partnership capacity for conducting CP activities; conducting MISO to dissuade adversary reliance on WMD; and other specialized technical capabilities. USSOCOM is the lead combatant command for synchronizing planning for operations against terrorist use of WMD and supports U.S. Strategic Command's synchronization responsibility for overall CWMD planning.

Counterinsurgency (COIN). COIN refers to the comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat insurgency and to address core grievances. SOF are particularly well-suited for COIN operations because of their regional expertise, language and combat skills, and ability to work among populations and with or through indigenous partners.

Counterterrorism (CT). CT operations include actions taken directly against terrorist networks and indirectly to influence and render global and regional environments inhospitable to terrorist networks. SOF often conduct CT operations through clandestine or low visibility means. SOF activities within CT include, but are not limited to, IO, attacks against terrorist networks and infrastructures, hostage rescue, recovery of sensitive material, and non-kinetic activities to counter ideologies or motivations hospitable to terrorism.

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<sup>100</sup> All definitions in this glossary are from USSOCOM, *Special Operations Forces Reference Manual*, 4th ed. (MacDill AFB, FL: The JSOU Press, 2015), 6-8.

**Direct Action (DA).** Short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or diplomatically sensitive environments and which employ specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets.

**Foreign Humanitarian Assistance (FHA).** Foreign humanitarian assistance is a range of DOD humanitarian activities conducted outside the U.S. and its territories to relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger, or privation. SOF can deploy rapidly with excellent long-range communications equipment, and operate in the austere and often chaotic environments typically associated with disaster-related HA efforts. Perhaps the most important capabilities found within SOF for FHA are their geographic orientation, cultural knowledge, language capabilities, and the ability to work with multi-ethnic indigenous populations, and international relief organizations to provide initial and ongoing assessments. CA are particularly well suited for stabilization efforts in disaster areas. SOF can provide temporary support, such as airspace control for landing zones, communications nodes, security, and advance force assessments to facilitate the deployment of conventional forces and designated humanitarian assistance organizations until the HN or another organization can provide that support.

**Foreign Internal Defense (FID).** FID operations involve participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security. SOF's primary role is to assess, train, advise, and assist host nation (HN) military and paramilitary forces. The goal is to enable these forces to maintain the HN's internal stability and to address the causes of instability.

**Hostage Rescue and Recovery.** Hostage rescue and recovery operations are sensitive crisis response missions that include offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to terrorist threats and incidents, including recapture of U.S. facilities, installations, and sensitive material.

**Military Information Support Operations (MISO).** MISO convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of MISO is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behaviors favorable to the joint force commander's objectives. Dramatic changes in information technology and social networking have added a new, rapidly evolving dimension to operations, and the ability to influence relevant audiences is integral to how SOF address local, regional, and transnational challenges.

**Security Force Assistance (SFA).** SFA involves DOD activities that contribute to unified action by the USG to support the development of the capacity and capability of Foreign Security Forces (FSF) and their supporting institutions. SFA supports the

professionalization and the sustainable development of the capacity and capability of FSF, supporting institutions of host countries, and international and regional security organizations. SFA must “directly” increase the capacity and/or capability of FSF and/or their supporting institutions. SFA activities assist host countries to defend against internal and transnational threats to stability. However, the DOD may also conduct SFA to assist host countries to defend against external threats; contribute to coalition operations; or organize, train, equip, and advise another country’s security forces or supporting institutions. USSOCOM serves as the lead for development of joint SFA doctrine, training, and education.

Special Reconnaissance (SR). Reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces.

Unconventional Warfare (UW). UW enables a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area. UW can be conducted as part of a GCC’s overall theater campaign or as an independent, subordinate campaign. When conducted independently, the primary focus of UW is on political-military objectives and psychological objectives. When UW operations support conventional military operations, the focus shifts to primarily military objectives; however, the political and psychological implications remain. UW includes military and paramilitary aspects of resistance movements and represents the culmination of a successful effort to organize and mobilize the civil populace against a hostile government or occupying power. From the U.S. perspective, the intent is to develop and sustain these supported resistance organizations and to synchronize their activities to further U.S. national security objectives. SOF assess, train, advise and assist indigenous resistance movements to conduct UW and, when required, accompany them into combat.

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